




JANICE DUSHANE

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 On November 19, 2012

It seemed like another picture-perfect day for Janice Dushane as she was preparing to leave her son David's home. It was Saturday, May 8th, 2010, and tomorrow was Mother's Day. The sun was shining, the cool ocean breeze had drifted into the inland areas of Southern California, and Janice was in good spirits as she had just spent the day babysitting her grandchildren.

Janice, age 67 ,  Janice's Family
kissed her daughter-in-law Tiffany and her two grandkids goodbye and then called her husband Robert to tell him that she was on her way home and to discuss dinner plans. After hanging up, she got into her 2005 Toyota Prius and began making the 60-mile journey home to Oxnard.

But this would be no ordinary drive. Close to the end of her trip, while on Interstate 101 in Los Angeles – known as the busiest and most-congested freeway in the United States, she noticed traffic slowing. She applied her brakes, but this time, for some reason, they weren't working.

Just miles from home, Janice knew she had to get off the freeway immediately. She took the Vineyard Boulevard exit (with which she was unfamiliar), in a frantic attempt to slow down the vehicle. As she pulled off the freeway, and began weaving her way through traffic, she knew she was endangering the lives of many, but she had no choice.

Some onlookers were astonished to see this Prius moving at high speeds up the off-ramp. Finally, Janice maneuvered the car into an embankment with shrubs in an effort to slow the car down. She didn't know that there was a ravine on the other side of the guardrail that would launch her airborne directly into the second story of a commercial building.

The impact not only crushed the automobile, but it also left Janice severely injured and near death. An ambulance took her to nearby St. John's Regional Medical Center. She had complex fractures in her right ankle, an

extensive fracture in her femur, multiple fractures in her pelvis, fractures in her left leg and ankle, fractures in her ribs, and worst of all, brain trauma. Her right lung was also filled with fluid.

By the time Robert and his three children arrived at the hospital less than two hours later, he was stunned to see breaking news footage regarding his wife's accident airing on the hospital ER lobby television. At that moment, he knew he had to remain strong in order to be the best possible advocate he could be for his wife of 43 years.

The doctor in charge explained the extent of her injuries and said that her chances of survival were not looking good. They discussed the possibility of multiple surgeries on both of her legs once her condition became stable enough. His two primary concerns that could possibly lead to imminent danger or death were the development of blood clots and infection.

In his recently completed book "Four Stones" about Janice's accident and recovery, Robert writes that at that moment, he repeated to himself "She needs the best I can be, and the best I can give. From this point forward, whatever else may be said of me, that's what she will get. Nothing less."

The book title was inspired by the early Mother's Day necklace which Janice was given to her by her children before she stepped into the car on that fateful day — a necklace with four gemstones representing each of her grandchildren.

From the moment Robert arrived at St. John's, he vowed never to leave Janice unattended without a family member present. He worked out a schedule with his daughter Jenniffer (a physical therapist who would prove instrumental in aiding her mother's recovery), son David, daughter Elli, extended family and close friends.

Thus began the slow and painstaking journey to recovery. After several weeks at St. John's and numerous medical procedures, Robert and his children arranged to have her transferred (at their own expense) to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Robert believed that given her extensive physical limitations, Janice would receive additional attention at a teaching hospital with full-time physicians in attendance.

At Cedars, immediate objectives included getting Janice off ventilation, inserting a g-tube to provide her proper nutrition, and to repair her badly damaged legs. Longer-term, the Dushane family understood they would have to deal with the traumatic brain injury and extensive rehabilitation needs.

In early June, Janice was transferred from Cedars-Sinai to CareMeridian Oxnard, a provider of post-acute care and rehabilitation options for people suffering from brain and spinal cord injuries, as well as other medically complex illnesses. Robert and Jenniffer selected the facility because of CareMeridian's ability to manage patients with trachs and g-tubes, its non-

institutional environment, friendly and qualified staff, and proximity to the condo she and Robert had shared prior to the accident.

In his book, Robert describes the facility as follows: "It has a homey feel that is somewhat attractive to me at this point. Besides the patient rooms, there is also an office, a dining room, a combination living room/physical therapy room, a wheelchair accessible washroom that has a special tub for taking baths and showers, and a kitchen."

Janice would spend the next 60 days at CareMeridian, suffering some setbacks, but mostly moving forward. When she arrived, she was non-verbal, non-ambulatory, and according to staff, highly agitated. During her time there, she received extensive attention from physical, respiratory, speech and occupational therapists. Thanks to constant encouragement by Janice's husband, children, caregivers and CareMeridian staff – in addition to Janice's own aggressive and diligent efforts – by the time she was discharged in July, Janice was walking with the aid of a walker, alert, oriented and eating soft foods on her own.

In Jenniffer Dushane's blog on caringbridge.org, she wrote, "I continue to be amazed at the brain's ability to heal itself with the help of a lot of wonderful therapists, nurses and other caregivers who provide my Mom with constant encouragement and loving care. We are so thankful for everyone at CareMeridian."

Janice's in-patient recovery was not over yet. She left CareMeridian and went to Northridge Hospital where she would begin a rigorous physical training routine to prepare her for ultimately returning home.

Four months following the accident, Janice was finally able to go home. Her dream of stepping through the front door of her own home had become a reality. She is surrounded by her loving husband Robert, children, grandchildren and an enormous circle of friends. She continues to improve daily and has often been sited by CareMeridian staff on the back of a tandem bike with Robert leading her through the streets of Oxnard and beyond.



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